

Agency budget restrictions (91.8%) were reported as the most frequently discussed factor when explaining why sworn personnel leave the sheriff's office. A high percentage of the respondents (83.7%) also noted that lateral transfers to other law enforcement agencies, retirement (63.3%) and individuals resigning to accept employment in the private sector (57.1%) were substantial factors which impact upon their respective agency attrition rates.

Over 80 percent of the responding agencies lost officers to larger law enforcement departments, suggesting that higher salaries and more competitive benefits may explain these losses. Lateral transfers to state law enforcement agencies was the second highest reported type of lateral transfer (69.4%) followed by employment with similar size departments (61.2%). Forty-nine percent of the sheriffs' offices reported that they are losing sworn personnel to smaller law enforcement agencies.

The data suggest that lateral transfers to larger law enforcement agencies and state law enforcement agencies are most prevalent in the participating sheriffs' offices with these two types of transfers explaining the bulk of the total number of transfers. In other words, the majority of the sheriffs' offices are losing the majority of their sworn personnel to larger and state criminal justice agencies. While personnel are also leaving to work in same size and smaller criminal justice agencies these losses are not significant and sizeable enough to exert a major impact on the Sheriffs' Offices' sworn workforce.

Overall, irrespective of the reasons why officers leave, the average length of an officer's employment is 28 months before he/she decides to leave the sheriffs' office. Sixty-one percent of the participating sheriffs' offices reported an average length of stay at 28 months or less with 83 percent reporting that their respective average length of stay was three years or less. Thus, it appears that a critical period of two years, four months, to three years, exists in which sheriffs' offices can implement policies and/or programs to improve retention rates and conversely minimize its attrition rate by retaining officers beyond this critical period.

A series of policy relevant research questions were examined, using the survey data, in an effort to further delineate recruitment and retention issues among the state's sheriffs' offices. Answers to these questions, actual quantitative survey data and the respondents' qualitative suggestions for improving recruitment and retention were compiled and analyzed to produce a series of five policy implications and recommendations. These included launching a more aggressive recruitment campaign, exploring both financial and non-financial options for retaining officers, examining current BLET screening procedures and conducting more research in the area of lateral transfers.